

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document contains the proposed Backcountry/Wilderness Management Plan for Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) and the associated Environmental Assessment (EA). The purpose of the plan is to serve as:

- 1) A public document that defines wilderness management policies and actions at RMNP;
- 2) A means to identify RMNP's wilderness vision, long range management goals, intermediate objectives, and actions and options to meet those objectives; and
- 3) A working guide for staff who manage the wilderness resource.

The plan addresses issues and provides guidelines for managing the non-developed areas of the park that are defined as backcountry or as designated, recommended, and potential wilderness. It details a wide array of issues and identifies specific standards for managing administrative actions and visitor use. The plan formalizes current park backcountry management practices, which have been in effect for the past twenty years; it does not affect developed areas, roads, or frontcountry park uses. This plan supersedes and updates any direction or guidance set forth in the 1984 Backcountry Management Plan. The plan's adoption is not a part of the recommendation before Congress to officially designate 248,464 acres (100,628 hectares) as wilderness.

The EA involves analysis of two plan alternatives: the proposed plan (Preferred Alternative) and the No Action/Current Management Alternative. The proposed plan discussion (Section 2.1) includes a detailed description of all items that comprise the plan elements. These include such topics as Management Classes, Resource Conditions, Visitor Experience Conditions, and Administrative Conditions and Management Activities. Within these major headings, the plan formalizes numerous standards and guidelines, many of which are already being implemented on a case-by-case basis. Standards or recommended actions are discussed for such elements as day use and overnight group size limits, stock use, aircraft use, the Backcountry Permit System, campsite standards and management, climbing management, trails management, and facilities in the backcountry and wilderness. The proposed plan provides for an enhanced wilderness interpretation and education effort and establishment of a Wilderness Steering Committee.

The No Action/Current Management Alternative continues the current status of backcountry and wilderness management at RMNP. It differs from the proposed plan in several key areas that are described in detail in Section 2.2 of this document. The primary difference is that there would be no comprehensive backcountry and wilderness management plan in effect, and proposed activities in backcountry and wilderness would be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis, based on policies and guidelines that are not formalized, but generally followed. There could be a lack of continuity with changes in staff and/or administrations, and there would be no documented process that would ensure the most consistent protection of backcountry and wilderness values.

This document analyzes the potential effects of both the proposed plan and the No Action Alternative on the natural, cultural, and social aspects of the backcountry and wilderness resource, described in Chapters 3 and 4. In general, the proposed plan includes many standards for resource protection that would result in beneficial, long-term impacts to natural and cultural resources, as well as a consistent review process that would have beneficial effects

on the administration of operations in wilderness areas. There may be some adverse impacts on park operations, due to limitations that would be placed on some management options. The application of a Minimum Requirement Analysis for all projects would require additional staff time and possibly result in some additional costs. Overall, cumulative beneficial impacts would be expected from implementation of the plan, especially considering the potential increased development of private lands that border RMNP.

All issues and concerns were considered and the most significant of these were analyzed in detail. The potential effects of each alternative on natural and cultural resources, visitor use, local and regional economies and the Park's environmental integrity are fully explored.

Important

In order to be considered in the development of the final Plan and EA, comments must be received by close of business on March 30, 2001. Public comments will not be available for public review until after the Plan and EA comment period ends. Names and addresses of people that comment on this Plan and EA would be available to the public upon request. Copies of the Plan and EA have been sent to public libraries in Boulder, Estes Park, Fort Collins, Grand Lake, Loveland, Longmont and Walden, Colorado. You can submit your comments to us in several ways:

- By mail: Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park, Colorado, 80517
- By e-mail: romo_superintendent@nps.gov
- By fax: (970) 586-1310
- Hand deliver: Rocky Mountain National Park Headquarters, 1000 Highway 36, Estes Park, Colorado or to the Kawuneeche Valley Visitor Center, Rocky Mountain National Park, P.O. Box 100, Grand Lake, Colorado 80447